

In effect, parents of Catholic school children pay twice—they pay their fair share of taxes necessary to support the public school system and they pay tuition at the school their children attend. In order to address this issue, I have introduced H.R. 441, the Education, Achievement and Opportunity Act. This bill provides refundable tax credits for the educational expenses incurred by parents for elementary and secondary school. Most significantly, the tax credit is used for private school tuition, however, it can also be used for other educational needs such as computers, tutoring or transportation fees. Thus, parents sending their children to public school can also benefit from this legislation.

A Catholic education challenges students through a combination of high standards, strong motivation, effective discipline and an emphasis on personal responsibility. It is an education that goes beyond preparation for a secular life; it is an education that prepares students for a Christian life.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all Members lend their support to H. Res. 657, and pass it unanimously.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 657, legislation that supports the goals of Catholic Schools Week, and acknowledges the crucial role that Catholic schools play in serving and strengthening our communities.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of this resolution. Catholic schools have an impact far beyond the confines of the classroom. Values such as devotion to faith, family, community, and character development, are the foundations of Catholic education. These values promote a respect for the dignity of individuals, and encourage outstanding civic participation.

Catholic schools are also scholastic standard bearers. With a student-to-teacher ratio of 15 to 1, they are committed to smaller class sizes. Smaller classes correlate with more accomplished students which in turn leads to the global competitiveness of American students in the 21st century.

In the 12th District of New Jersey, Catholic schools continue to work to serve communities. Corpus Christi School, a Catholic elementary school in the town of South River, at one time struggled to keep its doors open. However, through the efforts of concerned parents, alumni, and prodigious fundraising, the school was able to remain open. Corpus Christi now provides assistance to the whole community, offering a pre-kindergarten program for 3- and 4-year-old children. During Catholic Schools Week, Corpus Christi will be offering reduced tuition rates. Other schools in the 12th district will be celebrating Catholic Schools Week, including the Immaculate Conception in Spotswood, which will be using its activities to raise money for St. Jude's Hospital for Children.

These schools, and Catholic schools in general, advance ideals that we all hold dear. They enrich our communities, and I am proud to join with my colleagues in supporting this resolution.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 657 to honor the contributions of Catholic schools. Catholic schools provide students with a wonderful education and, in many cases, a quality alternative to overburdened public schools.

I am grateful for the work of the 39 Catholic schools which serve 10,395 students from di-

verse backgrounds, run by the Diocese of Bridgeport. These schools offer elementary and secondary education, as well as after-school programs. They provide a wonderful environment for learning and a strong sense of faith and discipline.

I commend the teachers, administrators, students and parents for their role in Catholic education, and the key role they play in creating a brighter, better-educated nation.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BONNER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 657.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

HONORING SACRIFICE AND COURAGE OF WEST VIRGINIA COAL MINERS

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 331) honoring the sacrifice and courage of the 12 coal miners killed and the stamina and courage of the one who survived the mine disaster in Sago, West Virginia, and the sacrifice and courage of the two coal miners killed in the Aracoma Alma mine disaster, and recognizing the rescue crews for their outstanding efforts in the aftermath of the tragedies, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 331

Whereas coal generates more than half of domestic electricity, providing millions of Americans with energy for their homes and businesses;

Whereas West Virginia is the Nation's second largest coal producing State;

Whereas an average of 7,600 pounds of coal per person per year is used in the United States;

Whereas the United States has an estimated 275,000,000,000 tons of recoverable coal reserves representing about 95 percent of all fossil fuel reserves in the Nation;

Whereas coal continues to be the economic engine for many communities;

Whereas coal miners are among the most productive of all American workers, producing 7 tons of coal per miner per day, which results in coal consistently being the most cost-effective choice for generating electricity in the United States;

Whereas during the last century over 100,000 coal miners have been killed in mining accidents in the Nation's coal mines;

Whereas the Nation is greatly indebted to coal miners for the difficult and dangerous work they perform to provide the fuel needed

to operate the Nation's industries and to provide energy to homes and businesses;

Whereas 13 West Virginia miners were trapped 260 feet below the surface in the Sago mine for over 40 hours following an explosion on January 2, 2006;

Whereas Federal, State, and local rescue crews worked relentlessly in an attempt to save the miners;

Whereas many residents of Upshur County, West Virginia, and the surrounding areas came together at the Sago Baptist Church to support the miners' families;

Whereas 12 miners, Thomas Anderson, Alva Martin Bennett, Jim Bennett, Jerry Groves, George Hamner Jr., Terry Helms, David Lewis, Martin Toler, Fred Ware Jr., Jack Weaver, Jesse Jones, and Marshall Winans, lost their lives on January 3, 2006;

Whereas only one miner, Randal McCloy, was safely rescued;

Whereas 2 West Virginia miners were trapped by a fire in the Aracoma Alma Mine on January 19, 2006;

Whereas Don Israel Bragg and Ellery "Elvis" Hatfield lost their lives in the Aracoma Alma Mine;

Whereas 2 West Virginia miners lost their lives in separate incidents in Boone County on February 1, 2006; and

Whereas Edmund Vance perished in the Long Branch No. 18 Mine and Paul Moss perished at the Elk Run Black Castle mine: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress—

(1) recognizes Thomas Anderson, Alva Martin Bennett, Jim Bennett, Jerry Groves, George Hamner Jr., Terry Helms, David Lewis, Martin Toler, Fred Ware Jr., Jack Weaver, Jesse Jones, and Marshall Winans for their sacrifice in the Sago, West Virginia, coal mine;

(2) recognizes Don Israel Bragg and Ellery "Elvis" Hatfield for their sacrifice in the Aracoma Alma, West Virginia coal mine;

(3) recognizes Edmund Vance and Paul Moss for their sacrifice in the Boone County, West Virginia, coal mines;

(4) extends the deepest condolences of the Nation to the families of these men;

(5) recognizes Randal McCloy for his stamina and courage that enabled him to survive in severe conditions for over 40 hours;

(6) recognizes the rescue crews for their outstanding effort resulting in the safe rescue of Randal McCloy; and

(7) recognizes the many volunteers who provided support for the miners' families during the rescue operations.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) and the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Con. Res. 331.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO).

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as the sponsor of House Concurrent Resolution 331 to honor the now 16

West Virginia miners who have lost their lives in coal-mining accidents this year.

I want to thank the Nation, I want to thank the Nation for their outpouring of concerns, prayers, and sympathy. You have fortified us as West Virginians.

On the morning of January 2, an explosion rocked the Sago Mine in Upshur County, West Virginia. Thirteen men were trapped 260 feet below the surface. One, Randal McCloy, suffered serious injuries resulting from a lack of oxygen, yet he miraculously survived. Twelve other miners, Tom Anderson, Alva M. Bennett, James Bennett, Jerry Groves, Junior Hamner, Terry Helms, Jesse Jones, Dave Lewis, Martin Toler, Fred Ware, Jackie Weaver, and Marshall Winans were killed in that tragedy.

Only 2 weeks later, another accident struck at the Aracoma Alma Mine in Logan County, West Virginia, taking the lives of Don Israel Bragg and Elvis Hatfield. Sadly, just last week, Edmund Vance and Paul Moss were killed in separate mining accidents in Boone County, West Virginia.

These men made the ultimate sacrifice doing a job that is vital to our Nation. Over 50 percent of America's electricity comes from coal, and our West Virginia veins run with an abundance of coal. Mining is the profession most closely identified with West Virginia, not only because of our State's abundant supply of the resource, but because of the character of our people. Coal is in our blood; whether we work in the mines or not, our heritage and our souls are coal-fired. West Virginians are proud and hard-working people with a deep devotion to our country.

Martin Toler, one of the Sago miners wrote to his family while he lay dying in the mine, and I quote, "It wasn't bad. I just went to sleep. Tell all I see them on the other side. I love you." Simple, powerful words with great meaning. The valor of these miners is, in fact was, with them until the end.

The 16 miners who died over the past 5 weeks in our State mines knew the dangers of their work. They knew that over the past century over 100,000 men have lost their lives in coal mining, but they performed their jobs with reliability and a sense of duty to their families, indeed our country. Miners know just how important their jobs are. They know how important it is to our economy across the Nation, and they sacrifice for us.

Author Homer Hickam of *Rocket Boys* fame, who himself grew up the son of a West Virginia coal miner, wrote and delivered what I thought was an incredible eulogy to the Sago miners. He listed a philosophy of life that exemplifies coal miners and, I think, all West Virginians:

We are proud of who we are.
We stand up for what we believe.
We keep our families together.
We trust in God.

We do what needs to be done.
We are not afraid.

Most of the time we are not thinking of coal miners when we turn on the lights or sit down to watch television. It is easy to take for granted the constant supply of relatively inexpensive electricity we have in this country. It is easy to forget that somebody gave of themselves and risked injury or death to mine the coal that powers the Nation's economy.

Today in the wake of the terrible tragedy at Sago and the death of the miners at the Aracoma Alma and Boone County mines, we as a Congress pause to remember the coal miners. We remember their hard work and sacrifice. We remember that each one of these men was a husband, a grandfather, a father, a brother and a son, and we pray for each of their families as they cope with the loss of a loved one. And we pray for Randal McCloy, who, despite improvements, faces a long road to recovery from his injuries.

This resolution also stands to honor the mine rescue teams who were willing to sacrifice themselves to save others. Rescuers of Sago were eager to enter even before it was safe to do so. Once in the mine, these rescuers demonstrated tremendous courage. And without their work, it is doubtful that Randal McCloy would be with us today.

West Virginia's communities came together during these tragedies, as they always do, to support their friends and neighbors. You see, in West Virginia, we are all family with a special closeness and respect for one another.

During this time I sat and talked with the families at the Sago Baptist Church as we awaited news from their rescuers. The prayers and support of people from across the Upshur County area and the Nation was overwhelming at the church, and this resolution honors the commitment and friendship shown by these folks.

I know that this commitment of community and family not only occurred in Sago, about also in Logan and Boone Counties because, as I said, in West Virginia, we are family.

Through our sorrow, we recognize our duty to do our part to improve safety for our miners. Sixteen West Virginians have been lost this year. While this resolution honors their loss, their legacy must be safe mines. It is important that Congress, State governments, MSHA, mine operators, and miners themselves work in a concerted effort to improve mine health and safety.

The West Virginia delegation has introduced on a bipartisan basis the Federal Mine Safety Act of 2006. I hope my colleagues will support this effort to bring enhanced technology to the mines, improve rescue teams, and ultimately save lives.

We all recognize the dangers of the mining profession, but we must do everything in our power to make underground mining safe. I have seen the pain and suffering in West Virginia at Sago, Logan, and at Boone County, and

I do not want to see that suffering again. We must act to prevent similar accidents.

May God bless the lost West Virginia coal miners and their families and friends.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL).

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California for yielding me this time, and thank him for his leadership and expertise in helping us on mine safety legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I rise and associate myself totally with the comments just made by the gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO), and I commend her for the very eloquent manner and touching manner in which those comments were made.

It is with sorrow that we rise today to express the heaviness in West Virginians' hearts. Grief hangs a misty veil across our mountains. Since just the beginning of this year, West Virginia has lost 16 brave coal miners in a nightmarish series of mine tragedies. Sixteen sons gone in the span of a month, 16 souls that too soon slipped the bonds of Earth. These were good and decent men, God-fearing men, brave citizens, caring fathers, loving husbands, loyal friends, and generous neighbors who worked hard to earn an honest wage. They walked in the wake of risk to provide for their families.

□ 1615

These were tough men, made strong not merely by the labor of digging coal, but also by the work of building a Nation.

Coal has long been the lifeblood of America's industrial engine. It has fueled our economic growth. It has reinforced our military might.

But none of this would be possible without the labor of coal miners, who have served our Nation quietly and faithfully for generations, but with precious little thanks. To these men, we owe so much.

Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of gratitude, I join with my West Virginia colleagues in offering this resolution and, again, commend the gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) for bringing it to the floor. Today we celebrate the courage and stamina of Randal McCloy whose miraculous survival in the Sago mines was a glorious gift. We thank the teams of rescuers who in recent weeks have risked their own lives to save the lives of others in our coal fields. And we honor the memories of these 16 men: Thomas Anderson, Alva Martin Bennett, Jim Bennett, Jerry Groves, George Hamner, Jr., Terry Helms, David Lewis, Martin Toler, Fred Ware, Jr., Jack Weaver, Jesse Jones, Marshall Winans, the two from my congressional district, Don Israel Bragg, Ellery "Elvis" Hatfield, whose families I sat with for close to 40 hours in the Melville Freewill Baptist Church as we sang, as we prayed together for a miracle that never happened.

And to the latest two, also from my congressional district, Edmund Vance and Paul Moss. We honor their memories. These brave men have now joined the ranks of so many miners before them who went to their daily shift anticipating the warm and loving hugs of family at day's end, but who emerged instead into the outstretched arms of heaven. May God bless them, their families and their brothers and sisters, still in the mines, who continue to walk in the wake of risk in service to our great Nation.

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These were good and decent men—God-fearing men, brave citizens, caring fathers, loving husbands, loyal friends, generous neighbors—who worked hard to earn an honest wage.

They walked in the wake of risk to provide for their families. These were tough men made strong not merely by the labor of digging coal, but also by the work of building a nation.

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Mr. Speaker, in that spirit of gratitude, I join with my West Virginia colleagues in offering this resolution.

Together we celebrate the courage and stamina of Randal McCloy, whose miraculous survival in the Sago mines was a glorious gift. We thank the teams of rescuers who, in recent weeks, have risked their own lives to save the lives of others in our coalfields.

And we honor the memories of these 16 men: Thomas Anderson, Alva Martin Bennett, Jim Bennett, Jerry Groves, George Hamner, Jr., Terry Helms, David Lewis, Martin Toler, Fred Ware, Jr., Jack Weaver, Jesse Jones, Marshall Winans, Don Israel Bragg, Ellery "Elvis" Hatfield, Edmund Vance, and Paul Moss.

These brave men have now joined the ranks of so many miners before them, who went to their daily shift, anticipating the warm and loving hugs of family at day's end, but who emerged, instead, into the outstretched arms of Heaven.

May God bless them, their families, and their brothers and sisters still in the mines who continue to walk in the wake of risk in service to our Nation.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

This year, 21 miners have lost their lives in mining accidents. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families. Today, we honor the 16 men who have died in West Virginia's coal mines and the lone survivor of the Sago mine accident. We also recognize members of

the mine rescue teams who put their own lives on the line to try to save their fellow miners.

On January 2, 2006, the Nation watched, waited, hoped and prayed that 13 men trapped in the Sago mine would return to the surface alive. Then the Nation was stunned when we learned that 12 men had died. Only one survivor, Randal McCloy, returned to the surface alive. Two more miners were lost at the Alma mine, despite the courageous efforts of the mine rescue teams. And just last week, two more miners died in Boone County.

The first 6 weeks of 2006 have seen an unprecedented loss of life in West Virginia's recent mining history. Working with the State of West Virginia, the Mine Safety and Health Administration has begun investigations into these accidents. The agency also has announced an internal review to ensure that all the regulations and procedures under the Mine Safety and Health Act were followed.

In response to concern about MSHA's Freedom of Information Act policy, Chairmen BOEHNER and NORWOOD and Representative CAPITO wrote to Secretary of Labor Chao to secure changes that would provide for greater disclosure of important information. Prior to this action, inspectors' notes and other information related to MSHA citations would not have been disclosed until a case exhausted all appeals. This important change will allow miners and their families better and quicker access to information regarding citations and inspectors' notes.

Only a thorough investigation will pinpoint the cause of these tragic events. Congress must ensure the investigation proceeds as efficiently as possible, and then consider any proposed changes to our Federal mine safety laws and regulations that will help ensure that tragedies of this kind do not happen again in the future.

Mr. Speaker, along with the rest of the Nation, we extend our condolences to the impacted families in West Virginia.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS).

(Mr. OWENS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, the resolution before us today is one that demands our attention, and I hope it is attention in more than just a ceremonial memorial way. It demands our attention for future action.

This resolution pays tribute to 17 courageous and hardworking West Virginia miners and their families, as well as the many rescue team members mobilized to save them in the face of last month's lethal accident at Sago mine, a subsequent fire at the Aracoma Alma mine, and 2 other mine incidents. Despite intense rescue efforts, 12 brave

miners were killed at Sago, as we all know. We honor them with this resolution, and we grieve with their families, friends, and neighbors who will miss them terribly. We also honor the sole survivor of those miners trapped by the Sago explosion, commending his courage and perseverance. We wish him and his extended family all the best throughout the long and arduous recovery process that he faces.

We also honor the 2 miners killed in the Aracoma Alma fire and 2 other killed in separate incidents in WV coal mines. All of the miners I just spoke of, and you heard their names read earlier, are referenced by name in this resolution. It is our hope that the family members and descendants of these hardworking men will find this resolution and our statements in their honor a source of solace as well as inspiration for many years to come. For we intend that their names and personal histories will be immortalized, so to speak, inscribed within a public law that Americans may read and refer to from this year forward.

But Members of Congress are not poets by nature, nor should we be. In addition to enacting this commemorative resolution, we must do far more to honor these West Virginia mine workers. We must take critical and immediate steps to ensure that all of the other mine workers from West Virginia and throughout the Nation get the safe workplace environments they need and deserve.

One speaker has already pointed out that a large percentage, about half of the electricity produced in America, is produced by coal. Throughout the world, coal is a major fuel producing electricity. Huge mines in Russia and China, and elsewhere, in many of these places their mines are perhaps often not as safe as ours. But there are some places obviously with mines that are safe, safer than ours. There are obviously technologies available which will avoid the kind of catastrophe we experienced here or at least minimize that kind of catastrophe.

I hope that all of us have read about the accident in the Pot Ash mine in Canada where a number of workers were trapped in an explosion and they all got out safely. It was pointed out that while they were waiting to be rescued, there were some cubicles or little cubby holes that they were able to go into and there they found extra oxygen, they found sandwiches and food and a number of things were stored there. And it had all been prepared ahead of time in case an accident should happen.

I doubt if the bottom lines of the profits for the coal mines were greatly affected by preparing those kinds of emergency arrangements. I think that we ought to take a hard look at the fact that there is technology available, there are techniques available to save miners' lives. There are places in the world where mine safety is made a priority. But nobody should be ahead of

America. No worker should be treated better than our workers in the effort to provide safety.

Congressional committees must conduct the requisite oversight hearings to determine whether Federal funding shortfalls or staffing shortfalls or rule-making snafus at the Mine Safety and Health Administration, MSHA, played any role in the two WV mine tragedies. And if that is the case, then we must fix any such problems without delay. For such subsequent congressional action will serve equally as a fitting and altogether appropriate tribute to the West Virginia men and their families, as well as rescue team members we honor today.

Thus, I urge my colleagues both to pass this resolution and to undertake all other congressional actions, from oversight to authorizing and appropriations legislation, essential to protecting America's hardworking miners and their families.

Mr. Speaker, the resolution before us today is one that demands our attention. It pays tribute to 17 courageous and hard-working West Virginia miners and their families, as well as to the many rescue team members mobilized to save them in the face of last month's lethal explosion at Sago Mine, the subsequent fire at the Aracoma Alma Mine and two incidents at other WV mines. Despite intense rescue efforts, twelve brave miners were killed in the Sago disaster, Thomas Anderson, Alva Martin Bennett, Jim Bennett, Jerry Groves, George Hamner Jr., Terry Helms, David Lewis, Martin Toler, Fred Ware, Jr., Jack Weaver, Jesse Jones, and Marshall Winans, and two brave miners at Aracoma Alma, Don Israel Bragg and Ellery "Elvis" Hatfield. Also, two other miners, Edmund Vance and Paul Moss, were killed at other WV mines. We honor them with this resolution and grieve with their families, friends and neighbors who will miss them terribly. We also honor the sole survivor of those miners trapped by the Sago explosion—Randal McCloy—commending his courage and perseverance. We wish Mr. McCloy and his extended family all the best throughout the long and arduous recovery process he faces.

All the miners I just spoke of are referenced by name in this resolution, which I am very pleased to cosponsor. It is our hope that family members and descendants of these hardworking men will find this resolution and our statements in their honor a source of solace as well as inspiration for many years to come. For we intend that their names and personal histories will be immortalized so to speak, inscribed within a public law that Americans may read and refer to, from this year forward.

But Members of Congress are not poets by nature, nor should we be. In addition to enacting this commemorative resolution, we must do far more to honor these West Virginian mineworkers. We must take critical and immediate steps to ensure that all the other mineworkers, from West Virginia and throughout the nation, get the safe workplace environments they need and deserve. We must ensure that the appropriate Congressional committees conduct the requisite oversight hearings to determine whether federal funding shortfalls, staffing shortages, or rulemaking snafus at the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) played any role in the Sago,

Aracoma Alma, and other mine tragedies. And if that is the case, then we must fix any such problems without delay. For such subsequent Congressional action will serve equally as a fitting and altogether appropriate tribute to the West Virginia men and their families, as well as rescue team members we honor today. Thus, I urge my colleagues both to pass this resolution and to undertake all other Congressional actions—from oversight to authorizing and appropriations legislation—essential to protecting America's hardworking miners and their families.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as he may consume to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURPHY).

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to solemnly support House Concurrent Resolution 331 that mourns the loss of so many coal miners from the Sago and Alma mine disasters and, quite frankly, it is a time for us to remember so many other coal mining disasters. The victims as well as the rescue crews who fought bravely to get them to safety ought to be recognized in the aftermath of this tragedy. But now our deepest sympathies are with the families and friends whose lives have passed.

I feel a special affinity to these miners, my own great-grandfather having been a coal miner in Pennsylvania, and while I was a student at Wheeling Jesuit University in Wheeling, I spent so much time working in towns and volunteer work in mining towns in West Virginia, among them being Mann, West Virginia where the great Buffalo Creek flood disaster hit when a dam from a coal mine collapsed and wiped out so many people in that town.

It is a rough life for coal miners and coal mining towns, for the families, the wives and loved ones who sit and wait each time the elevator goes down into the shaft. The struggles and the hard scrabble life is so often immortalized in songs and folk songs over the years. And they are true, indeed, for the life is difficult for men and women who work in the mines and recognize the dangers and the constant safety that the mine operators must attend to.

It is also time to recognize that there are teams of people out there who did so much and responded so quickly, in particular Consol Energy, which had all five of their West Virginia teams and three Pennsylvania teams first on the site to try and help. We wished and we prayed so much that this would not have ended as it did. Instead, we had hoped that perhaps it would have been what happened at Cue Creek mine disaster of a couple of years ago in Pennsylvania when we all waited and watched with our eyes glued to our televisions as nine miners emerged from the mine late at night.

We wished for that. We prayed for that. Sadly that did not happen. And sadly, there may be other disasters of this type, but we must work hard to set the goal that it never happens again. We know that coal is a vital part of American energy. We know that coal

and all the things that come out of manufacturing related to coal are a vital part of our country's economy. And the men and women who continue to work in the mines down below or on the surface are all part of that dedication and their willingness through their courage to give so much every day.

And then finally, perhaps, what we have to make sure we do, as the gentlewoman from West Virginia was saying, is work very hard with rescue teams and strong safety regulations for mines and enforcement of those regulations to prevent these tragedies from happening again. It is only through such actions that we would fittingly remember those who have come before us and died, and those who may come in the future and be suffering as well. That is the very least we owe their families. And as we honor those who have lost, we need to work towards that safety for those miners and their families for the future.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, and Members of the House, I am honored to join in support of this resolution offered by our colleagues from West Virginia and to join our colleagues in paying tribute to these 16 brave miners who lost their lives last month in West Virginia, and also to the miner who lost his life in Pike County, Kentucky, who died during the mine roof collapse, and to express the condolences to their families and to their friends who have lost loved ones.

We continue to hope and pray for the full recovery of Randal McCloy who lived through this ordeal at the Sago mine disaster, and wish him well. I join, I am sure, our entire Nation in recognizing the sacrifice of these individuals. And I want to salute the efforts of dozens of brave rescue workers who volunteered to risk their own lives to save others and the efforts of citizens of the affected communities who continue to help and to support the families of victims and to deal with their loss.

□ 1630

Despite a half century of improvements in mine safety, the truth still remains that underground mining continues to be one of our country's most dangerous occupations. It is also an occupation that we recognize many people would have a very difficult decision to make to join this occupation. It is one of the reasons we talk about the bravery, the courage, and the sacrifice of these workers and those who entered the mines after the disaster to join them, because we recognize that many of us would not want to do this.

But we also understand that just a week ago the President was here telling us the importance that coal would make if we really want to achieve energy independence for this Nation for a whole host of reasons that are very

good for this Nation. Then we continue to need to have the sacrifice and the courage and the bravery of the mining community and of these communities to send their young men and women into the mines. But if it is about their bravery and their courage and their sacrifice, then our obligation is to meet their bravery with the duty of care.

There is no question that our progress in making mining a safer and healthier occupation than it has been in the past has been remarkable, but the Sago tragedy shows us that our job is not done. Death, injuries, and serious illnesses remain a very real part of those who go down into the mines and to their families and their communities and the brave men and women who help when the safeguards fail.

The men and women who need the solid incomes provided by mining jobs face difficult choices every morning before they go to work and see their loved ones at the door. I think the way that we truly honor their courage, their sacrifice, and their bravery, and these miners who have lost their lives and the volunteers who helped out and the grieving families and the communities, is to make the promise, as the gentlewoman from West Virginia said, that part of their legacy is safer mines and a safer occupation and a safer future for their children and their grandchildren and others who will go down into the mines. That means that we must meet our duty of care to these miners to make sure that we fully understand where the failures took place, where the improvements can be made, and where the risk is unacceptable.

Mr. RAHALL and his West Virginia colleagues have already introduced legislation that deserves immediate consideration to make certain improvements in standards and operations of the Mine Health and Safety Administration. I am delighted that they already received a partial response to that with the Agency engaging in emergency temporary standards to require coal operators to maintain additional self-contained, self-rescue devices in storage areas within underground coal mines, and to require coal operators to notify the Agency within 15 minutes of an accident. This is quite properly done on an urgent and emergency basis. I have urged the Education and the Workforce Committee to immediately commence oversight hearings to help us to determine the actions that would help strengthen the agency so that it can carry out the important responsibilities we have vested in it and what they owe the workers in the mines.

Next week, Monday, February 13, my colleagues and I are sponsoring a mine safety forum. We have invited the miners and their families and mine safety experts to share their views on how Congress and the Department of Labor can make mine safety enforcement more vigorous and effective.

It seems clear to me that there are serious questions regarding this adminis-

tration's track record on mine safety that the employees and families of the Sago and Aracoma Alma mines have a right to know. I think we have to know the impact of the changes in the regulations and the regulations that were withdrawn in 2001 and the regulations that were implemented in their place. What was the margin of safety? Was there a change in that margin of safety, and did they have impact on the overall mine safety in the mine? We know that some of those regulations that were withdrawn at that time are now seen as urgently needed, as I just recited, from the response to the West Virginia delegation by the mining agency, safety standards for oxygen and breathing devices, standards for flame-resistant conveyor belts that Mr. RAHALL has raised, and that their withdrawal may have undermined the safety at Sago and Aracoma Alma mines.

We want to know what is the relationship between the drop in maximum fines and the usage of fines. Are fines helpful? Do they deter bad behavior? Do they, in fact, make for improvements to take place?

What is the relationship between the mines and those who are repeat offenders of serious violations of the current mine safety regulations and the protections that are put in place for those miners? Should they be dealt with in a different fashion? Do we fully understand the voluntary compliance assistance program that is currently in place? Should that continue to be extended to those mine owners that, again, repeatedly violate the law?

What is the relationship between the voluntary nature of the program and the compliance and the margins of safety that we expect for these miners?

Does the administration have the right people in the right place for the running of this Agency? Are their qualifications commensurate with the duties that they have to the miners in the field, and are we sure that we have the best people to continue the downward trend of mine fatalities in the mine, but also the general safety environment within the mines?

And we want to make sure that, in fact, the Department of Labor has kept pace with existing mine safety technologies, such as electronic tracking and communications devices and reserve oxygen chambers, technologies used in other countries, in some cases in other mines in this country, but clearly are not mandated. But we now see, as we start to do the forensics of what took place here, that maybe these things, had they been in place, these miners would have had the opportunity to walk out of that mine. These miners may have had a chance to shelter in place until rescuers could have gotten to them if they did not understand their ability to work their way around the danger that presented itself.

So these are the questions that the miners and their families will address in the forum. These are the questions that must be addressed by the adminis-

tration, and these are the questions that must be addressed by this Congress, and must be addressed by this Congress in an independent fashion.

I am not sure I entirely agree with my colleagues on the other side that we must await the administration's doing its own investigation and hearings prior to our embarking upon that effort. I think that we ought to ask these people to come before the Congress and to explain the situation that we see.

Again, this is about the legacy of these miners' lives. It is about the future of mining in this country. It is about our responsibility to these individuals, to their families, to these communities. Again, it has been made clear that coal is going to play an evermore important role in our energy future, so we must understand that these individuals were patriots in that effort to achieve energy independence in this country. And I would hope that we would understand that as we pay tribute to their courage, to their sacrifice, and to their bravery to go down in these mines, that we inherit on their behalf and on behalf of their families a duty of care to these individuals and a responsibility to make sure that we have done all that we can do, as the government, in assuring their safety and making sure that they are working under the best safe environment that is possible for them and their colleagues.

Again, I thank the members of the West Virginia delegation for bringing this resolution to the floor and urge the support of it by all of our colleagues in the House.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Con. Res. 331, "Honoring the sacrifice and courage of 12 coal miners killed and stamina and courage of one who survived the mine disaster in Sago, West Virginia and the sacrifice and courage of the two coal miners killed in the Aracoma Alma mine disaster and recognizing the rescue crews for their outstanding effort in the aftermath of tragedies."

I would first like to commend the West Virginia delegation including my good friend Mr. RAHALL, for introducing this resolution honoring those who lost their lives and the dedicated rescue crews who worked tirelessly during the crises. This resolution proposes recognition of our brave citizens who gave their lives for their work. West Virginia is the Nation's second largest coal producing State that generates more than half of domestic electricity and provide millions of Americans with energy for their homes and businesses. The United States has an estimated 275 billion tons of recoverable coal reserves representing about 95 percent of all fossil fuel reserves in the Nation, meaning that the average of 7,600 pounds of coal per person per year is used in the United States.

Moreover the coal miners are extremely productive American workers in the face of grueling conditions, producing 7 tons of coal per miner per day.

During the last century over 100,000 coal miners have been killed in mining accidents in the Nation's coal mines. The Nation is greatly indebted to coal miners for the difficult and

dangerous work they perform to provide one of the sources of fuel needed to operate the country's industries and to provide energy to homes and businesses.

There were 12 miners, Thomas Anderson, Alva Martin Bennett, Jim Bennett, Jerry Groves, George Hammer, Jr., Terry Helms, David Lewis, Martin Toler, Fred Ware, Jr., Jack Weaver, Jesse Jones, and Marshall Winans, that lost their lives on January 3, 2006, but fortunately one miner was rescued, Randal McCloy. I also recognize the 2 miners that lost their lives early this year in a fire in Aracoma Alma Mine on January 19, 2006. These men were Don Israel Bragg and Ellery "Elvis" Hatfield.

It is a burden on all of our hearts when hard working citizens of this country perish, especially while on the job. My prayers go out to the friends and families of those who have lost their lives.

I support H. Con. Res. 331 and I urge my colleagues to follow suit. I thank you for your consideration and yield the reminder of my time.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, last month, America witnessed the tragedy of the Sago and Aracoma Alma mine deaths. We saw terrible things happen to good people, and the Nation was saddened by the events that unfolded.

I join with my colleagues in honoring these hard-working Americans who died or were injured while laboring to support their families. We also recognize the individuals who worked so hard to save them.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the friends, family, and neighbors of each of the miners affected.

Mr. COSTELLO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 331, a resolution honoring the 16 extraordinary miners who lost their lives in the recent West Virginia coal mine accidents and recognizing the courage of Randal McCloy who survived. Further, I join my colleagues in extending our condolences to the families of these miners, and recognize the brave efforts of the rescue crews and volunteers during this time.

I represent southwestern and southern Illinois, a region with a rich coal mining history. Coal mining has played a significant role in transforming and developing the region since the mid-1800s when substantial coal mining in Illinois began. In 2006, the coal industry continues to be a vital component of our economy, and one we are working to strengthen for the future. Improving mine safety standards is an important part of this process in Illinois, West Virginia, and other coal producing States.

These unfortunate coal mining fatalities in West Virginia have highlighted the pressing need to revise the national coal mine health and safety standards to ensure miners are equipped with state of the art technologies and tracking devices, and sufficient emergency supplies of oxygen. I am pleased West Virginia legislators acted quickly to enact a state law requiring coal companies to give employees electronic tracking devices and to store oxygen supplies underground. Precautionary measures are needed to protect the health and safety of our coal miners and penalties for flagrant violations of the law and regulations must be enforced. To this end, I have joined my colleagues in the House as a cosponsor of H.R. 4695, the Federal Coal Mine Safety and Health Act of 2006.

Mr. Speaker, I know my colleagues join me in honoring the West Virginia coal miners for their courage and sacrifice and expressing our deepest condolences to their families.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BONNER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 331, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title of the concurrent resolution was amended so as to read: "Concurrent resolution honoring the sacrifice and courage of the 16 coal miners killed in various mine disasters in West Virginia, and recognizing the rescue crews for their outstanding efforts in the aftermath of the tragedies."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Mrs. Wanda Evans, one of his secretaries.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 40 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1712

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. REHBERG) at 5 o'clock and 12 minutes p.m.

APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON H.R. 4297, TAX RELIEF EXTENSION RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2005

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take from the Speaker's table the bill (H.R. 4297) to provide for reconciliation pursuant to section 201(b) of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2006, with a Senate amendment thereto, disagree to the Senate amendment, and request a conference with the Senate thereon.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT OFFERED BY MR. NEAL OF MASSACHUSETTS

Mr. NEAL of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I offer a motion to instruct conferees.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. Neal of Massachusetts moves that the managers on the part of the House at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the Senate amendment to the bill H.R. 4297 be instructed as follows:

(1) The House conferees shall agree to the provisions of section 106 of the Senate amendment (relating to extension and increase in minimum tax relief to individuals).

(2) The House conferees shall recede from the provisions of the House bill that extend the lower tax rate on dividends and capital gains that would otherwise terminate at the close of 2008.

(3) To the maximum extent possible within the scope of conference, the House conferees shall insist on a conference report that would not increase the Federal deficit for any year.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 7 of rule XXII, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. NEAL) and the gentlemen from California (Mr. THOMAS) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. NEAL).

Mr. NEAL of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, we all know that perhaps more important than anything else we do here, we set and we establish priorities. Our motion to instruct sets forth the priorities that I believe should be followed in the conference on this legislation.

The priorities of the Republican majority are clear: Large tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthiest in our society, while slashing initiatives that protect the most vulnerable in our society. Even in normal times, these priorities would be wrong, but these are not normal times.

America is currently involved in two wars, one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. These are the first wars in our country's history where only those in the military and the poor are being asked to sacrifice.

Hurricane Katrina forced America to see poverty and its consequences. And let me compliment former President Jimmy Carter for his remarks yesterday at Mrs. King's funeral when he spoke of that very issue.

□ 1715

The administration has converted surpluses into an enormous budget deficit, but has done nothing to prepare programs like Social Security and Medicare for the future other than to threaten privatization. The most significant fiscal turnaround in the history of America has occurred on the watch of the Republican majority here in the Congress.

What I think is interesting, and I say this with great confidence, during these past few years we have almost doubled defense spending, we are fighting two wars, we have created a Department of Homeland Security, we have witnessed the national principle